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RECENT THEOLOGICAL LITERATURE

THE INTERNATIONAL CRITICAL COMMENTARY ON ISAIAH

As stated on the title-page, the commentary on Isaiah in this Series,¹ has been "with a view to the speedier completion of this series" assigned to two writers, Professor Gray and Professor Peake. The present volume of 472 pages contains the first instalment and extends to the close of chap. xxvii.

The first paragraph of the preface has a special interest. "This Commentary should have been written by another; and all who are in any way familiar with the work of the late Dr. A. B. Davidson, and conscious of the profound sympathy and penetrating insight that he always brought to the interpretation of Scripture, must regret that he had made no substantial progress with the Commentary, which the editors of this series had intrusted to him, at the time when Christian scholarship and Christian life were left the poorer by his death."

All who are interested in the study of this great book will be in full sympathy with the sincere and graceful tribute thus paid to the departed scholar who exercised, during the last generation, such a wholesome influence in the sphere of Old Testament criticism. One remembers the articles published in the *Expositor* more than a quarter of a century ago on "The Servant Question" and how strong an impression was made that if the Servant was a personal Messiah those special poems could not have been written in the Exile. There was a certain naturalness then in Duhm's suggestion that as they did speak of an individual Messiah they were of different authorship and later date. The integrity of the section and the collective interpretation has since been strongly maintained by Budde, Giesebricht, Marti, and others. Further, the publication of the small volume in the "Temple Bible Series" showed that Dr. Davidson had accepted, in principle and in main outline, if not in all its details, the analysis of the book that is now generally accepted and which is represented in the present volume. However, it was evidently too late in a day that had been full of noble service for Dr. Davidson to attempt a new review of all the problems in criticism and exegesis that had been raised by recent discussions on this great collection of prophetic literature.

¹ *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Isaiah.* By George Buchanan Gray. New York: Scribner, 1912. xi+472 pages. \$3.00.

Perhaps, after all, it was well that the preparation of the volume for this series was postponed until the present time, when a much fuller review of the critical discussion could be taken into account. English editions of Isaiah, with more or less comment, have not been lacking in recent years, as we are reminded by reference to the names of Cheyne, G. A. Smith, Skinner, Whitehouse, Box, Kent, Glazebrook, McFadyen, and Wade, but there is still a place for a book like the one before us, which covers in a scholarly fashion and in moderate space the whole field of introduction, textual criticism, translation, and exegesis. A careful examination even of a small part of the book convinces us that it is a credit to British scholarship and up to the high level maintained by this series in the Old Testament. (See Professor A. R. Gordon's review of a similar volume by American scholars, *American Journal of Theology*, April, 1912, pp. 285 ff., and for one of the New Testament volumes cf. the statement by Professor Shirley Jackson Case, p. 301 of the same issue.)

At the present time we may describe the standpoint of the volume as conservative as well as critical; that is, the main outlines of the analysis worked out by Duhm and Cheyne, as a continuation and completion of much earlier research, is accepted but intelligently examined and its uncertain nature on many points admitted. But of course the book does not represent "the radical wing scholarship" in any such sense as Professor Kennett's recent volume (see *American Journal of Theology*, April, 1912, pp. 287 ff.). See Dr. Gray's reference to Professor Kennett, p. lx. The exilic date of Deutero-Isaiah (chaps. 40-55) is accepted, and much of chaps. 56-66 referred to the fifth century B.C. It will thus be seen that the modifications with regard to those sections suggested by Professor Kent (in connection with studies by Drs. Cobb and Torrey) are not accepted by Drs. Gray and Peake. The "North Arabian Theory" and Gressmann's suggestions receive careful statement and sober criticism. We are glad to note that Professor Gray pays a well-deserved tribute to Gesenius' edition: "but with Gesenius' Great Commentary (1821) comes a fresh and plentiful source of valuable information and suggestion." Scholars are, of course, well aware of the fact that the movement of criticism, notwithstanding the brilliant rushes of particular critics, has on the whole been slow, but it is well that the general body of students should be reminded that over ninety years ago the great Hebrew grammarian gave a clear statement of the exilic date of chaps. 40-66, and of the later origin of chaps. 24-27. When we turn to Gesenius, p. 180, and read his note on 2:3, "In a very pure form and

worthy of both prophets is the representation that the peoples will go on pilgrimage to Jerusalem not to offer sacrifice but to learn the ways of God—a noble presentiment which has passed into fulfilment through Christianity," we feel that the commentator is, in this case, more than a grammarian, that he is an interpreter in the fullest sense.

But to return to Dr. Gray: one feels the difficulty of doing in a brief note any justice to the vast amount of solid work here presented. The critical literature that has gathered round the book of Isaiah is in quantity so immense, in its range so wide, that we are in danger of getting lost in it, and the writer of this commentary has certainly qualified himself to be a competent guide. To keep the thing from becoming too bulky and to preserve something like a due proportion of the parts must have been a difficult task, but our author has mastered it. In a modern commentary repeated lists of names and opinions are of little service, and yet there are times when it is highly helpful to be shown, as is done here in several cases, that the exegesis of important passages has had a real history.

The author's style in dealing with disputed passages is shown in the following quotation. On 2:2 ff., "Judged by itself, without prejudice derived from its present position, the poem does not betray its origin unmistakably. But if the arguments that have been adduced be insufficient to prove that it was not written in the eighth century, still more insufficient are the arguments to prove that it was. The spirit of the whole and some of the particular ideas, as hinted in the commentary that follows, leave the impression of a passage that was written nearer the time of chaps. 40–55 and Ezekiel than of Isaiah." This may strike some as being a little too judicial, but at any rate it is not dogmatic. To the present writer the conclusion seems to be right, but then one's *impression* comes not simply from the reading of this passage but from one's whole idea as to the growth of the religion. A radical critic like Duhm only maintains the possibility of an early date for this passage by, as we think, unduly narrowing its meaning.

One would like to examine some of the translations, but lack of space forbids the attempt; the author tells us that he has "deliberately, where necessary, sacrificed form and style, in order to make them as expressive as possible." Here is one specimen, which may be used to illustrate the statement:

1:16c: Cease to do evil,
Learn to do well;
Seek out the right

Make the violent(?) keep straight
Secure the right of the orphan
Undertake the cause of the widow.

Here is another with some real poetic liveliness in it:

23:16: Take thou the lyre,
Walk with the throng,
Harlot whom all forget;
Play, play with fire,
Sing oft (thy) song.
To be remembered (yet).

Is not “play with fire” rather ambiguous?

This may be compared with Cheyne’s four-line version of the same words:

Take thy lute, and go about the city,
Harlot forgotten *now by men*
Play thou with skill, sing many a ditty
To win remembrance *then*.

The introduction contains a brief discussion, nine pages, devoted to the important question “The poetical forms of the prophetic literature, and of the Book of Isaiah in particular”; in which he takes the position generally held by Old Testament critics, viz., that “more elaborate analysis of Hebrew texts, such as Bickell or Sievers offers, rests on too precarious a basis to be made as yet a secure instrument even of textual criticism.” He recognizes the *balancing rhythm* or the couplet of equal lines and the *echoing rhythm* or couplet of unequal lines (the so-called Kinah rhythm). The latter he prints as a couplet, while Duhm, Cheyne, etc., give it as *a line* with a pause after the third accent. “If the preceding remarks suggest that there is considerable uncertainty or irregularity in Hebrew rhythms or meter they will very correctly convey the impression left on the present writer by his study of them.” Hence it is “rarely wise to insist on any textual change merely on rhythmical grounds.” Thus we have the same cautious temper throughout the commentary; no attempt is made to give any revolutionary contribution, but the results of wide study on the different departments are presented in a clear, unpretentious form.

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